

17 August, 2018

LaVA Project  
Medicine Bow National Forest  
2468 Jackson Street  
Laramie, WY 82070

**RE: Comments on the DEIS for the Landscape Vegetation Analysis (LaVA Project) via email**

On behalf of the over 2,600 agricultural members and the over 10,000 nonagricultural members who support a strong agricultural economy, we would like to offer our support Alternative 2 for the vegetation management action being analyzed by the LaVA project.

This summer in Laramie, smoke from numerous wild fires in the West has significantly impacted air quality in the area. Numerous other areas in Wyoming and the West have also been impacted by these fires. At a recent meeting of Western Farm Bureau Presidents and Administrators, this was a major discussion topic. The current impacts are important, but the policies that have lead to these fires are even more important to address. This group of Western State Farm Bureau's represent over 385,000 Farm Bureau members in the 13 western states.

Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation has adopted numerous policies over the years urging the Forest Service to manage and utilize tools to prevent and mitigate wild fires. Some of these policies go back into the late 1970's and 80's when it was recognized by forest professionals that management of forest resources can lead to less severity of wild fires and in some instances can be an important tool to stop the spread of wildfires.

Unfortunately, with the numerous law suits filed in that era, fuel load reduction became a thing of the past as well as the industries which could accomplish these tasks. This has lead to significant buildup of fuel loads which, along with a pine bark beetle epidemic, has lead to the potential for significant wildfire events on the Medicine Bow National Forest. We note that areas allowed to be harvested for trees in the 1970's now have living trees as a counter point to those killed by pine beetles.

At the time timber sales were being protested, the groups protesting those activities argued for the need for living trees in the forest for the benefit of numerous species. Most of the arguments presented at that time did not recognize that trees like all living species, have a finite lifespan. Professional foresters at the time assured the public that the tree species in much of the inter-mountain West were nearing the end of their lifespan and absent some action by land managers there would be a significant number of dead trees. This has, in fact, occurred.

Wyoming Farm Bureau members are heartened by the Forest Service's efforts to begin to address the fuel loads on the Medicine Bow National Forest and fully support those efforts.

We remind the Forest Service that grazing can also be an important tool in management of fuel loads and would encourage the Agency to look at opportunities to utilize grazing animals in those areas

where decadent tree fuel loads are mitigated among other opportunities. Continued efforts should occur to keep fuel loads from building back up to levels we currently see on the Medicine Bow.

Wyoming Governor Matt Mead recognized the crucial state of the forests in the State when he appointed a task force to look at possible solutions.

We reiterate recommendations from the "Final Report of the Governor's Task Force on Forests":

*Recommendation 3. The State of Wyoming should proactively reduce the threat and occurrence of destructive wildfires by managing vegetation and fuels; protecting homes, communities, and other values at risk; and effectively and efficiently responding to wildfire.*

*Recommendation 5. Collaborate with forest managers to make available and enhance a sustainable supply of wood and biomass consistent with sound management.*

*Recommendation 6. Continue to stress the importance of grazing to forest management.*

*Recommendation 7. Conduct a review of recent and ongoing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses on forest lands in Wyoming that address vegetation management in order to identify best practices and promote efficiency and effectiveness.*

The LaVA proposal falls closely in line with this task force's recommendations. In addition to the resource management recommendations, the task force also recognized the need to establish opportunities for economic utilization of the forests. LaVA is an important beginning for this task.

There is widespread support by the public for this project. As mentioned earlier, 13 Western State Farm Bureau's representing a large membership supports efforts to reduce catastrophic wild fires in the West by addressing fuel loads.

The Wyoming Governor's Forest Task Force also recognized the need to address fuel loads and reduce the risk for wildfires which is attempted by the LaVA proposal.

In conclusion, this project can lead to a forest less susceptible to wildfires and provide important economic activities for the local area and we again reiterate our support for Alternative 2. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely

Ken Hamilton  
Executive Vice President

cc Board; NER & SGA Committees; Western State Farm Bureaus